



Cogs and Smoke



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Chapter 1 by Luke Meyers

We had assembled a mighty machine, and stood admiring its glory from a respectful distance. Franco, ensconced in protective gear, finalized his preparations at the console.

"Nearly ready, everyone! Keep your eyes crossed and your fingers open wide!" his distorted voice came through the mic he wore under his bucketish helmet. He unlocked the control wheel and flipped out its handle, then slowly began cranking.

At first, the wheel barely seemed to budge. Franco braced himself and leaned into it, and the machine emitted a deep, intense groan as the works began to turn. Working it around a full circle once, he continued pumping it around with increasing speed. The machine shuddered and popped, but held together and began to hum to life. Franco worked furiously, turning the crank now as fast as his muscles would allow. He called out some question to us, but we couldn't hear over the clatter.

Before we could respond, it became obvious what he was asking about. In the spherical empty space at the center of the machine, we saw...

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